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Human resources management

Comprehensive policy guidelines for consultants in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in compliance with General Assembly resolution 59/270 of 23 December 2004 on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to ensure that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees developed and utilized comprehensive policy guidelines for the selection and management of consultants to ensure transparency and objectivity in their engagement, monitoring and evaluation as well as to make greater efforts to ensure a geographical balance in the use of qualified consultants, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, and to report thereon to the Assembly at its sixty-first session.

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I. Background

1. General Assembly resolution 59/270 rose out of the Assembly's consideration of the annual report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services for the period from 1 July 2002 to 30 June 2003 (A/58/364). In paragraph 23 of that report, the Office of Internal Oversight Services recommended that comprehensive policy guidelines, consistent with United Nations administrative instructions, needed to be developed at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on the selection and management of consultants to ensure transparency and objectivity in their engagement, monitoring and evaluation. It noted that consultants were often engaged to undertake UNHCR core functions and, although such arrangements provided operational flexibility, those individuals were not consultants as defined by administrative instructions; that UNHCR had become dependent on consultants for mainframe computer maintenance, since their knowledge and expertise had not been transferred to regular UNHCR staff, an arrangement that was not cost-effective; and that consultants were not selected competitively and the methodology for determining their fees needed to be reviewed.

II. Introduction of a new policy

2. On 10 March 2005, UNHCR announced to all of its staff members the implementation of its new comprehensive policy on individual consultants as at 1 April 2005 in an internal memorandum. The policy is consistent with administrative instruction ST/AI/1999/7 and Amend.1, on consultants and individual contractors.

3. The policy is intended to ensure consistency and to facilitate administrative procedures regarding the hiring of a consultant. It sets out general information on consultants, the financial regulations governing their use and the general conditions of their service. It covers issues relating to the hiring, administration and remuneration of consultants as well as procedures for their travel, security clearances and medical requirements.

4. Since 1998, responsibilities for the selection, hiring and administration of consultants has been delegated to line managers in the regional bureaux and departments/divisions at headquarters. The responsibilities of the Division of Human Resources Management and the directors were therefore clarified by the new policy in order to ensure consistency and accountability in the use of consultancy contracts and in the selection, hiring and determination of fees.

III. Changes introduced by the new policy

5. The launch of the new policy required only a few changes to the procedure or process, as reported below.

6. A new type of consultancy, the locally hired international consultant, is introduced, in addition to international and national consultants. Provision is also made for consultants engaged for UNHCR protection deployment schemes.

7. The duration of a consultancy cannot exceed a contract period of 24 months within a 36-month period, as defined by administrative instruction ST/AI/1999/7. A mandatory break in service is required after a contract of 11 consecutive months.

8. When expenditure on a contract or related extension reaches US$ 100,000 or more, the request must be submitted to the Headquarters Committee on Contracts for review and approval. The authority to approve contracts for less than US$ 100,000 is delegated to all bureaux and department/division directors at headquarters by the Director of the Division of Human Resources Management.

9. A request for consultants must be based on detailed terms of reference. The remuneration levels are in turn based on the complexity of the assignment, according to the terms of reference, and the specialized knowledge and experience required to perform the assigned tasks. The prevailing market rates should also be considered.

10. Provisions for daily subsistence allowance and other entitlements have not changed, although the rate for living expenses for international consultants in Geneva has been increased and travel arrangements have been clarified.

11. A full medical examination is required for consultants assigned to or on mission to category B, C, D and E duty stations, reimbursable by UNHCR. A certificate of good health is sufficient for assignments in category H and A duty stations, the costs of which are covered directly by the consultant.

12. A consultant on mission or assigned to a duty station with phase I security status or above has to successfully complete security training prior to travel.

13. Attached to the policy are administrative guidelines outlining the steps to be taken when hiring consultants; the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved in a consultant contract; and the procedures for work and travel.

IV. Evaluation and monitoring

14. Under the guidelines, upon completion of the consultant's services or the delivery of the final product specified in the contract and the terms of reference, the performance of the consultant and/or the quality of the product must be evaluated and recorded by the hiring manager. Final payment is to be made only when an evaluation has been done to ensure the entire assignment was satisfactorily completed. In addition, the hiring manager must obtain confirmation that the consultant has no outstanding debts or liabilities with UNHCR.

15. The hiring manager is responsible for carrying out the day-to-day monitoring and supervision of the consultant, whereas overall responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the policy as well as exercising oversight lies with the Division of Human Resources Management.

16. The reporting system indicates which nationality the consultant has in order to monitor geographical diversity among consultants at UNHCR. The unit within the Division of Human Resources Management handling consultancies on a worldwide basis is not proactively monitoring the diversity aspect as the authority for hiring has been delegated to the hiring manager.

V. Statistics on consultants for 2005

17. During 2005, UNHCR hired 265 consultants and issued 374 consultancy contracts.

18. Some 266 of the 374 consultancy contracts had a duration of up to 4 months, whereas only 30 of them had a duration of 10 months or more.

19. In 2005, nine consultants were hired for assignments in information technology areas, of whom two were hired to work at headquarters and the other seven assigned to the field.

20. Most of the international and locally recruited international consultants were remunerated according to level B on the remuneration scale, equalling a monthly fee of between US$ 5,700 and US$ 7,300, depending upon the expertise required and the experience of the consultant. The average daily fee for a consultant was US$ 163.

21. The consultants remunerated on a level A basis represent a considerable number as well. However, there are very few remunerated at the C and D levels. Those remunerated at the D level are generally retired staff members hired for a limited number of days for very specific projects.

VI. Conclusion

22. **The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has developed and now utilizes comprehensive policy guidelines for the selection and management of consultants to ensure transparency and objectivity in their engagement, monitoring and evaluation, in accordance with the recommendation of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (A/58/364, para. 23), and will keep implementation of these guidelines under review to ensure that these objectives are met.**